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*for Heston as an  
elaboration on similar  
memo of 14 Nov.  
Taken to WH by  
AM of 16 Nov.  
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE  
16 November 1961

OCI No. 2961/61

Copy No.

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Details on the Conduct of the South Vietnamese  
Election of 9 April 1961

1. The conditions under which the April elections were held in South Vietnam were such that the outcome was never in doubt.

2. Diem has never permitted a cohesive opposition to develop in South Vietnam and in the April presidential election he faced no effective challenge. He was opposed by two little known candidates: rubber plantation owner Nguyen Dinh Quat and an elderly doctor of Chinese herb medicine, Ho Nhut Tan, neither of whom was a seasoned politician or had any organized political backing. The most effective political parties existing at the time of Vietnam's partition have long since been weakened or factionalized; many prominent oppositionists now live in exile abroad and among those still in South Vietnam there is little unity of purpose or action. The most influential opposition leaders in Saigon at the time of the abortive coup d'etat in November 1960 have either fled, been arrested, or remained under surveillance or suspicion. In at least two cases, prominent independents seeking public office have been disqualified on technicalities.

3. In addition, a combination of factors such as Diem's overwhelming advantages as incumbent, his tight rein on the government apparatus, and the mechanics of election regulations offered in themselves controls adequate to assure his re-election. The election law provides for secret vote, poll inspectors, and other safeguards, including an election committee on which each candidate is represented, but this was headed by

DIA and DOS review(s) completed.

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a pro-Diem national assembly member. By committee regulations, each candidate had equal access to government funds earmarked to finance the campaign but could not use any private funds; the campaign officially lasted from 15 March to 8 April and each candidate was allotted an equal but limited number of press conferences, public meetings, radio addresses, and campaign literature. All such literature was screened by the committee to weed out any basic themes espoused by the Communists--national reunification, reduction of military strength, supremacy of the proletariat--and, to preserve national unity, candidates were prohibited from leveling personal attacks at one another.

4. These restrictions on campaign activity served to handicap opposition candidates more than Diem who had had the advantage for years of advertising himself throughout the land. Diem and his running-mate Vice President Tho were also able to campaign extensively under the guise of performing government duties. Furthermore, no restrictions were placed on political party expenditures or activities, enabling the government's mass organizations to work actively on Diem's behalf. No restrictions were placed on the government-controlled press, which mounted derogatory attacks on the opposition candidates. Other harrassment was reported such as the heckling of opposition party meetings and the alleged government blocking of the private bank account of candidate Quat on the ground that he owed unpaid taxes. On the official ballot itself, symbols were used to identify candidates for the benefit of illiterate voters. Diem the only nationally known candidate, was represented on the ballot by his own picture; Quat was identified with the symbol of a water buffalo and Tan with a lotus flower.

5. In the election, Diem received about 89 percent of the total vote, which amounted to an estimated 93 percent of the eligible voters. In Saigon, where opposition to Diem is most vocal, the level of voter sophistication highest, and foreign official and press observation greatest, Diem won only about 62 percent of the vote. The high rural turnout reported is difficult to square with the extensive Viet Cong influence in the countryside. In some areas--voter turnout

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apparently exceeded voter registration; this may be due in part to the counting of votes of military units there in the provincial total. There is probably little question that in some cases local officials, who owe their positions to Diem, falsified figures reported to Saigon or were otherwise able to influence the vote. In this connection, the South Vietnamese air force commander told the US air attaché he was particularly anxious that the air force should make a strong show of loyalty to Diem. He indicated that he would make speeches to his troops in support of Diem and that at Tan Son Nhut air force base there would be separate ballot boxes for the use of air force personnel and their dependents. On the other hand, a district official in Quang Ngai province, central Vietnam, told a US consular official that elections should be limited to the educated in Saigon and Hue because the Vietnamese peasants "want only to be left alone and would vote for any man in power until he resigns or dies, be he Diem, Ho Chi Minh or de Gaulle."

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